AFFIRMATION:
UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY CONCERNS
Post Office Box 1021 Evanston, Illinois 60204 SUMMER 1985

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BY: .....

FALL MEETING TO MARK 10 YEARS

"Growing into our Next Decade" is the theme of the semi-annual AFFIRMATION meeting scheduled for September 20-22 in Chicago. The meeting will celebrate the 10th anniversary of AFFIRMATION as a voice for lesbians and gay men in the United Methodist Church. It is a unique opportunity to share our rich history as a movement.

The meeting begins on Friday evening with a time for personal and corporate story telling. "Building a Grassroots AFFIRMATION Movement" will be the topic of the Saturday morning and early afternoon sessions. These will be led by Shirley Taylor and John Hannay, AFFIRMATION's newly designated coordinators for Regional Organizing. Persons who have expressed interest in such work are especially encouraged to attend the meeting. Chicago Area Bishop Jesse DeWitt has been invited to bring greetings.

Late Saturday afternoon will be devoted to a regular business session. At that time we will hear reports on the Reconciling Congregation program, fundraising activities, and Memorial Fund projects.

The Business Session will be followed by a gala dinner/dance on Saturday evening which is open to the Chicago lesbian/gay community. A gourmet vegetarian meal will be prepared by friends of AFFIRMATION. Music will be provided by a long-time AFFIRMATION friend.

The weekend will conclude with a service of celebration on Sunday morning at which Virginia Hilton and Paul Abels will preach. This celebration is being planned and will be led by members of Affirmation and Wheadon United Methodist Church, a Reconciling Congregation in the Chicago area. The service will be open to members of the Chicago community.

The weekend's activities will be held at Wheadon Church, the site where AFFIRMATION's organizational meeting in 1975. Housing will be arranged for participants in private homes, or can be arranged in hotels if desired. Cost for the weekend is $2.00 per thousand dollars of annual income (with a minimum of $10) plus participation in the travel pool. It is strongly advised that travel plans be made immediately, so as to take advantage of special fares. Travel can be arranged through AFFIRMATION's travel agent Dick Cash at Broadway Travel [redacted].

Those who are planning the weekend intend this to be a special time for all participants. It will be a time to remember and celebrate; a time to look ahead and plan for the future; a time to share with one another the good news of God's activity in our lives. Make plans (see page 5) and register now! Think Chicago!

THELMA STEVENS, A WOMAN FOR JUSTICE

BY FAITH WALKER*

Thelma Stevens has seen and worked for many changes in Methodist circles. During the 1930s, she was a community worker in the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church, South. One of only two whites living and working among blacks in Augusta, Georgia, she knew what it was like to be shunned by whites. Thelma Stevens had a support system of rare and gifted women who believed following Jesus meant working for justice and peace, including better relations between races.

Belle Harris Bennett, Louise Young, Estelle Haskin, Dorothy Tilly, Carrie Johnson, and Jesse Daniel Ames worked with Stevens in opposing lynchings and encouraging integration within the denomination. Mary McLeod Bethune, Dr. Flemmie Kittrell, and Susie Jones provided valuable guidance. Together they planned oppportunities for Methodist women, black and white, to eat, meet, study, pray and worship together. It was an effective strategy for breaking down social barriers, but it required real courage of all those who participated. The parallels with the fears many persons today have of lesbians and gay men seem obvious.

Like many women of their day who were called to a full life of Christian work, Stevens chose not to marry or enter a committed relationship. Her colleague and friend Dorothy Webber provided support as they bucked segregation for 25 years. In 1940 the General Conference met in Atlantic City, where there was only one hotel that would serve blacks. That hotel was where Stevens and Webber stayed as they pondered how to get the church to provide integrated accomodations for delegates.

Thelma Stevens was Executive Secretary of the Department of Christian Social Relations of the Women's Division of the Methodist Church for 28 years. When she took the position, it was understood that she would be using her influence to work for the inclusion of all races in the denomination and especially for an end to the Central Jurisdiction. (Ed. Note--Creation of the Central Jurisdiction as a segregated system for black Methodists was a concession to segregationist Methodists, who otherwise would not have agreed to the 1939 union between the Methodist Protestant Church and the northern and southern M.E. churches.)

In 1964 home and foreign mission work, formerly done by the Women's Division, was given over to the direction of the whole church through the Board of Missions. This required the Women's Division to redefine its purpose. Stevens' leadership was instrumental as the Division broadened the understanding of mission to include working for justice in national and local issues. She led the Division to publish a documentary STATES LAWS ON RACE AND COLOR, which was distributed to libraries and law

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*The author's name is a pseudonym, required to protect his/her identity because of the effects of homophobia in the church and society. AFFIRMATION works and prays for a day when these persons will be able to use their own names in this publication.

schools. The first compilation of its kind, STATES LAWS was influential in removing state segregation laws. Stevens also led the Division in addressing its own racism by adopting a Charter on Racial Policies in 1952, updated in 1962.

Local units of the Women's Society for Christian Service (WSCS) and the Wesleyan Service Guild studied the charter and adopted it in 1954. That same year the Supreme Court's decision on segregation in public schools made inclusiveness a real "threat" to the South. Stevens did not back away from the issue under pressure, but continued to educate Methodists about racial justice, hiring women of color for the Women's Division staff and pressing for a similar hiring policy in the Board of Missions.

Thelma Stevens also participated in the struggle of women for empowerment in the church. The Women's Division worked for the election of women to the General Conference. Twenty years of organized committee work bore fruit in 1956 when the right of women to be fully ordained was affirmed and led in 1972 to the creation of a task force that was to become the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

Presently "retired" and living in Heritage, Tennessee, Thelma Stevens maintains an active leadership role. Last year she attended her twelfth successive General Conference. As convenor of a coalition of progressive caucuses (including AFFIRMATION, the ethnic Minority caucuses, the Women's Caucus, and MFSA), Stevens worked toward the continuation of the Ethnic Minority Local Church missional priority, for increased openness to lesbians and gay men, for inclusive language, and for an end to what she considers the regionalism of the jurisdictional system. She also campaigned for her favorite women and ethnic minority episcopal candidates. A 1980 recipient of the Methodist Federation for Social Action's Ball Award for social justice leadership, Thelma Stevens presented the 1984 award to Bishop Melvin E. Wheatley, Jr.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT STILL NEEDED

During the past few months we have written letters to all of you asking for financial support for our ministry. A number of you have generously responded and for that we are truly grateful. Yet our financial needs still exist. While more than $3000 has come in since February, we still need twice that amount if our programs are to grow and thrive. Can you help out today? Send your checks for $100, $75, $50 or (?) to: AFFIRMATION, P. O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.

P.S. A number of AFFIRMATION folk have become regular pledgers of $10, $25 or $50 per month. By doing this, they can give a lot of support without having to pay too much at once. Perhaps you can join them too! Please write us a check now--before you forget!

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ARE YOU MOVING SOON? Don't forget to send a change-of-address card to us! We want to stay in touch with you! Send your notice to: AFFIRMATION, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. THANK YOU!

ANOTHER WORD ON THE TRAVEL POOL

There still seems to be some confusion and concern within AFFIRMATION over the travel pool we use for each meeting. The travel pool was created to distribute the travel costs as equitably as possible among all meeting participants. Based on the average travel costs for all participants, persons having travel costs below the average are asked to contribute the difference between their actual cost and the average cost. Funds from the travel pool will be distributed to those with higher than average travel costs to reduce their expenditure to the average.

AFFIRMATION remains sensitive to the reality that there are those who may not be able to participate fully in the travel pool, especially those of lower incomes whose travel costs are below the pool's average. In such cases AFFIRMATION asks each person to contribute as much as s/he can toward the pool. AFFIRMATION then makes up the balance out of general operating funds.

In no case do we want the travel pool to serve as a barrier to anyone who wants to attend a meeting. The travel pool is intended to help people attend the meetings -- not keep people away! Please do not let it be a barrier to you! We want everyone to be able to come. If you have any questions or comments, please contact a Coordinating Committee member.

REGIONAL ORGANIZING BEGINS

It's finally happening! The AFFIRMATION Spring meeting initiated further plans for regional organizing. A grass roots network of AFFIRMATION people will emerge to provide support and engage in dialogue at annual conference and other local levels.

The process involves identifying and setting priorities among strategic areas for organizing. A lesbian and a gay man from each area are recruited and trained to serve each priority area as regional organizers. Intense public relations and advertising efforts in the regions enable the identification of other lesbians and gays, friends and family members. These persons are invited to help plan or to participate in a conference or other event which stimulates mutual resource and support sharing and perhaps the creation of a local group.

Once the process is complete (or well underway) in one area or set of areas, it can be initiated in new locales. Some testing along these lines was done in conjunction with the AFFIRMATION meeting in Florida. The first three priority regions identified were the Southeast (Florida, Georgia, and Alabama), the northwest (Washington State, Oregon, Idaho and Montana) and the North Central Midwest (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan). Possible regional organizers for these areas are now being identified.

AFFIRMATION is very excited about this process. If you have any questions or comments on this plan, or if you are interested in organizing a regional network/group in your area, contact either John Hannay or Shirley Taylor (see the address box in this newsletter). Your participation is necessary and encouraged.

STOP PRESS--Family Reunion a Smashing Success!

The July 4th weekend found twenty-five members of the AFFIRMATION family gathered in the shadow of Pikes Peak, near Colorado Springs for a weekend of relaxation, reflection, hiking, worship and more relaxation. From a vantage point a mile and half closer to the sun than most of us are used to being, we also found warmth in time with n old friends and new friends alike. We came from as far away as Washington, D. C. and Washington state; from California and Tennessee and Indiana; Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska and Texas; and from as nearby as Denver.

We hiked and ate, sang around the campfire and ate, constructed liberation theologies and ate, fed the squirrels and ate, went sightseeing and ate, and (what else?!) went shopping and (all together now!) ate. The only thing we didn't have to eat was quiche!

Hot days and warm evenings seemed unmountainlike at times, but complaints were few. Except perhaps from a few nonplussed folk at a post Independence Day concert who wondered why "those people" seemed to be having such a good time.

As the too short weekend ended, discussion centered on when we would see one another again (in Chicago for most of us) and how soon we could have another family reunion. It seems clear this event is destined to become another tradition among the AFFIRMATION family. Anyone volunteering to plan the next reunion?

Many thanks are due--to the planning committee, to others around the country who gave advice and support, to the Rocky Mountain Conference camp office and the manager of Templed Hills Camp, and especially to committee chair and main man of the reunion, Brad R. of Washington, D. C.

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REGISTRATION FORM
"GROWING INTO OUR NEXT DECADE"
September 20-22, 1985
Wheadon UMC, Evanston, Illinois

Name _____ Evening phone _____
Street Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Will you need housing in a private home? _____ Yes _____ No.
Do you prefer a nonsmoking environment? _____ Yes _____ No.
Do you have special dietary needs? _____ Yes _____ No.
Please specify _____
_____

All registrants should plan on arriving in Chicago by 5:30 p.m. on Friday and departing after 2:30 p.m. on Sunday. (Because of the trafic situation in Chicago, we will not attempt to meet persons at air, train

(SEE REVERSE)

AFFIRMATION COORDINATING COMMITTEE

JOHN HANNAY
[redacted]
WASHINGTON, DC [redacted]

LYLE LODER
[redacted]
LOS ANGELES, CA [redacted]

MIKE UNDERHILL
[redacted]
CHICAGO, IL [redacted]

VIRGINIA HILTON
[redacted]
ALBANY, CA [redacted]

D. J. PORTER,
[redacted]
NEW HOPE, PA [redacted]

TWO LESBIAN MEMBERS WHOSE NAMES CANNOT BE USED.

MARY LARUE
[redacted]
PHILADELPHIA, PA [redacted]

SHIRLEY TAYLOR
[redacted]
ALAMEDA, CA [redacted]

Spokespersons

MARY GADDIS
[redacted]
HOLY CITY, CA [redacted]

MORRIS FLOYD
[redacted]
MINNEAPOLIS, MN [redacted]

If you have comments, suggestions, ideas or contributions for the AFFIRMATION newsletter, contact:

AFFIRMATION Communications
[redacted]
Minneapolis, MN [redacted]

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or bus terminals. Inexpensive public transportation is available from each of these to Evanston, but travel time will be up to two hours.) For help with travel plans, call Dick Cash at [redacted].

Registration Fee: $2.00 per $1,000 of annual income, with a minimum of $10.00 Note: all persons will be expected to participate in the travel pool (see note on page 4).

Please make checks payable to: National AFFIRMATION and send to: **P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.** Once registration is received, information as to local arrangements and directions will be sent to you. Please register as early as possible.